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Biographical Sketch
OF
FRANCIS DWIGHT.

[Reprinted from Barnard's American Journal of Education for December, 1858.]



Miss Dugan

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The following Memoir was prepared at the request of the Editor,
and published in Barnard's American Journal of Education for
December, 1858.

of March, 1808. At a very early period he gave promise of future proficiency. Possessed of an ardent temperament and strong will, he evinced an unconquerable determination to excel in the acquisition of knowledge. At the age of fourteen, (1822,) he entered Philip's Academy, at Exeter. When sixteen, (1824,) he entered Harvard University, at Cambridge, graduating therefrom in August, 1827, when he entered the law school of Northampton, in September, 1827, where he pursued the study of the law for two years.

On the first of September, 1829, he became a member of the law school, in Harvard University, and in July, 1830, he received most gratifying testimonials from Hon. Joseph Story, of the United States Supreme Court, and the Hon. John H. Ashman, both professors of the law institution at Cambridge. The name of Judge Story, the Dane professor of law at Harvard, associated as it is with the most distinguished judicial and private honor, will live, so long as talents and virtue command respect. An endorsement from that source was truly an inestimable passport, and it was with pride that Mr. Dwight could claim the friendship and regard of that eminent jurist.

When about to separate, Judge Story placed in the hands of Mr. Dwight the expression of his opinion that, during his studentship, he had been "very diligent and attentive to his studies, and irreproachable in his conduct and character," and "I take pleasure," he says, "in adding, that his talents and professional attainments entitle him to the confidence and respect of the profession and the public."

The severe application of Mr. Dwight compelled a short cessation from his professional studies, and he, soon after leaving Cambridge, visited Europe for a year or two, where he followed his literary tastes, and reveled in the enjoyment of association with many of the distinguished men who then filled the public eye; visiting all parts of Europe; examining the public institutions of France, England, and Germany, especially those pertaining to education; and employing his mind, while in the pursuit of health, upon those subjects which he thought might be appropriated usefully thereafter, to benefit the institutions of his own country. He seems to have kept his faculties constantly exercised, and prepared to receive every impression which surrounding objects might afford. It is thought his benevolent mind was first directed, during his tour abroad, to the subject of improved facilities of education for his countrymen, when contemplating the wide-spread despotism and misery existing in foreign nations, the certain offspring of ignorance and vice.

In 1834, he was admitted to the practice of the law, as an attorney at the bar of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts.

In 1835, he removed to Michigan Territory, where he was admitted to practice as an attorney and counselor.

In 1838, he commenced his residence in the State of New York, and was admitted to practice as attorney and counselor by Chief Justice Nelson, and, in 1840, was admitted, by Chancellor Walworth, to practice in the Court of Chancery.

Mr. Dwight resided, at this time, at Geneva, Ontario County. At this delightful retreat, his natural temperament had full indulgence in the calm, but industrious pursuit of learning, and not a moment was lost in storing and adorning, by hard study and investigation, his cultivated mind.

Mr. Dwight was an early and enthusiastic admirer of the gigantic intellect, and consummate statesmanship, of De Witt Clinton, and cordially adopted the philosophical and benignant sentiments of that illustrious man, as expressed in his gubernatorial message to the legislature, in 1828.

"Permit me," says Gov. Clinton, "to solicit your attention to the two extremes of education, the highest and the lowest. And this I do, in order to promote the cultivation of those to whom fortune has denied the means of education. Let it be our ambition (and no ambition can be more laudable,) to dispense to the obscure, the poor, the humble, the friendless, and the depressed, the power of rising to usefulness, and acquiring distinction." Here he first originated and embarked in the novel and also important enterprise of establishing, under state patronage, a journal to be devoted exclusively to the cause of education. There were great discouragements in the undertaking, but Mr. Dwight was not of a mold to succumb to any obstacles; he adopted, in all of his resolutions, the inimitable remark of Buxton: "The great difference between the great and the little, the powerful and the feeble, is made by energy, an invincible determination,—a purpose once fixed, and then death or victory." Aware, however, of the responsibilities he proposed to assume, he wisely consulted with older heads, and with those whose countenance and influence could best sustain his efforts. At that time, learned and prominent public men, and wealthy private individuals, were manifesting deep interest in the cause of education. Mr. Dwight judiciously sought the counsel and advice of many of them, and in all quarters, and from the highest and best sources he received encouragement and promise of support. The Hon. John C. Spencer, being then, as secretary of state ex-officio, superintendent of the common schools of the state, a duty which he performed with his accustomed energy and zeal, was written to by Mr. Dwight, respecting his project, and

Mr. Spencer's reply (dated Albany, Dec. 9th, 1839,) greatly encouraged and stimulated his exertions. He says:—

Your letter of the 7th is received. I have long felt the want of a common school journal, through which my own communications might be made to commissioners and trustees, and which otherwise might be made a channel of valuable information. I know nothing which promises so much immediate benefit to common schools, and the cause of education generally. I am very glad you have turned your thoughts to the subject, and I do not hesitate to say that I deem you better qualified than any other person I know to conduct such a journal. I am clearly of opinion that such a paper should be published at the seat of government. At that point there is a concentration of intelligence, and of interest, that can exist nowhere else. My wish, therefore, would be that you should come to this city, and establish a paper devoted to education, that should be worthy of our state, and of the character she has already acquired.

And again, on 3d February, 1840, Mr. Spencer writes:—

I approve, heartily, of the plan of the journal for common schools contained in your letter of the 30th ult., and I should be glad to have you issue a number as a *specimen*. I entertain little doubt that the legislature will authorize me to subscribe for 10,000 copies, at \$2500; but of course I can not guaranty it, and I suppose, until that subscription is made, I can not say absolutely *go on*. But the exhibition of a specimen number would, of itself, have great influence. We want a *new name*, that shall be appropriate; what say you to

"The District School Journal for the State of New York."

This means something different from the *Common School Journal*, and refers directly to our system. If you conclude to print, let me know, and I will give you a letter of encouragement to publish, and, I doubt not, Gen. Dix will do the same.

In the month of March, 1840, Mr. Dwight commenced the journal, adopting the name recommended by Mr. Spencer. Its appearance produced a wide-spread sensation, and it was received with marked satisfaction by all interested in the great cause of education throughout the state. Mr. Spencer (March 28th, 1840,) writes, to Mr. Dwight:

I have received the copies of the District School Journal which you sent me, and am much pleased with its matter and manner. It is well filled, and its typography is beautiful. I hear it spoken of by several already, in high terms—have read one of them with great satisfaction. The selections are good, the tone and spirit is right, and every thing is as it should be.

Thus fortified and supported by the head of the school department, Mr. Dwight persevered in his adventurous task, and most efficiently and successfully did he discharge his editorial duties. He soon adopted the advice of the secretary of state, and removed to Albany, which proved a better location for the diffusion of his journal.

Very soon after reaching Albany, he was strongly urged to enter the political arena, and take part in the great presidential struggle, but he resolutely declined all solicitations of that kind. Although high official distinctions were promised, he could not be prevailed upon to quit the path of duty he had marked out for his future conduct. The turbid waters of politics were uncongenial to his tastes and habits, and he decided sensibly and definitely, to reject all inducements of official preferment, and to devote his life and talents to the great cause of *popular education*.

Mr. Dwight's singleness of purpose, and unwearied assiduity, secured the cordial co-operation and approval of the public authorities at the capitol, and, during a period of five years, his District School Journal was the focus which attracted, and cemented together, all the elements in the state, favorable to the great cause in which he was engaged. Mr. Dwight's modest deportment and captivating manners won for him golden opinions and sincere regard; it was remarked by those in closest communion with him,—

“ His tongue is still in concert with his heart,—
His simplest words an unknown grace impart,—
His air, his looks, proclaim an honest bent,
And, ere he speaks, we yield our full assent.”

He soon became pre-eminent in official station. He was selected as county superintendent of common schools for the city and county of Albany, and in that character, for several years, visited and reformed the schools under his jurisdiction; and his reports to the superintendent of common schools, display an admirable familiarity with the subject. He was one of the members and secretary of the board of common schools of the city of Albany; and, on 1st June, 1844, was unanimously appointed, by the regents of the university, one of a board, or executive committee, for the care, government, and management of the “*Normal School*,” his colleagues being the superintendent of common schools, (Col. Samuel Young,) Rev. Alonzo Potter, Hon. Gideon Hawley, and Rev. Wm. H. Campbell.

In the midst of his many labors, arduous and unremitting, but performed, with delight because his heart was in the work,—at the time when the seed he had scattered broadcast, was ripening into a harvest of generally acknowledged usefulness,—with a larger measure of social and domestic happiness than is meted out to but few men, and with a future full of promise to him in all his relations, public and private, his brief and bright career was extinguished by death on the 15th of December, 1845, at the age of thirty-seven.

We can not better close this imperfect sketch than by recording here some of the many public and private expressions of sorrow which this event elicited. They afford the best possible evidence of the high appreciation of his services to the cause of education, and of his private worth, entertained by those who were associated with him in public trust, or who knew him well in the inner circle of his home, and of private friendship.

The executive committee of the state normal school, on motion of Mr. Benton, secretary of state, passed resolutions of condolence, expressing their appreciation, in the highest degree, of the eminent serv-

ices of Mr. Dwight, their late associate secretary and treasurer, as an ardent and most devoted friend of popular education, and an active and efficient member of that board. Similar resolutions were passed by the normal school, by the Albany teachers, and by a large number of the county school associations.

The Hon. Henry Barnard, then Commissioner of Public Schools in the State of Rhode Island after noticing the circumstances of Mr. Dwight's death, in the "*Journal of the R. I. Institute of Instruction*," closes with the following condensed summary of his labors and character.

At the time of his death, Mr. Dwight was a member of the executive committee of the state normal school, at Albany, as well as secretary and treasurer of the board, member and secretary of the board of commissioners of the district schools of Albany, and editor of the District School Journal of the State of New York. Since 1838, he has labored with a zeal, devotion, and intelligence surpassed by no other, in behalf of the various features of improvement which have been incorporated into the noble system of elementary instruction, of which the Empire State is now so justly proud. One of the first, if not the first Union School in the state, was established mainly by his efforts in the village of Geneva. The District School Journal was started originally at his own risk, as an indispensable auxiliary in the work of improving common schools. The system of county supervision, and of a single executive officer for each town, instead of the irresponsible and complicated plan of numerous commissioners and inspectors for each town; the origination and organization of the state normal school; the local improvements in the district schools of the city of Albany; and the various conventions of the county superintendents, found in him an early and earnest friend, co-operator, and advocate. He had consecrated himself to the great work of making education,—education in its large and true sense,—the birthright and birth blessing of every child, whether rich or poor, within the bounds of New York; and, for this object, he was willing to labor, in season and out of season, and to spend and be spent. But in the midst of his labors and his usefulness, he has been cut down; and, to use the language of his associates in the superintendence of the normal school, "in this sudden and afflictive event we recognize the frailty of earthly anticipations, and that neither distinguished public services, nor the highest prospect of future usefulness, nor 'troops of friends,' nor high responsibilities and far-reaching benevolence, nor worth, nor talents, can avert the inevitable hour." We dare not intrude upon the sacredness of private sorrow further than to add, that it was in the courtesies of private life, in the faithful discharge of all the duties of a friend, brother, husband, and father, that the excellencies of Mr. Dwight's character were best seen; and it is in these relations that his death is most severely felt.

An appropriate notice of the event, from the pen of the Hon. Horace Mann, appeared in the "*Common School Journal*," published in Massachusetts, in which, with great force and beauty, he depicted the merits of his departed friend:—

Before entering upon the discussion of any of the topics appropriate to the present occasion, we have the melancholy duty to perform of announcing the death of our personal friend and co-laborer, Francis Dwight, Esq., of Albany, so long and so widely known as the able, the sincere, and the efficient advocate of common schools. With other eminent friends of popular education in the State of New York, Mr. Dwight had been actively instrumental in devising, and in causing to be placed upon the statute book, the present code of laws on the subject of public instruction in that state, which code, at the time of its adoption, and until it had been substantially copied by other legislatures, was the most perfectly organized and

efficient system in the world. In all these stations of honor and of trust, Mr. Dwight had conducted himself with great discretion, ability, and zeal. As an examiner of schools, he was competent, impartial, and thorough; having the readiest disposition to discover and to applaud the acquisition of knowledge, and the justice to unmask and expose pretension and ignorance. As a member of the executive committee of the state normal school at Albany, he assisted in establishing that school upon a most admirable foundation, whether we consider the course of instruction there pursued, or the inducements held out to invite talent and educational enterprise from all parts of the state to avail themselves of its advantages. As editor of the *District School Journal*, being aided by the patronage of the state, which, at the expense of the common school fund, sends one copy of the *Journal* to every school district within its ample borders, he has spread before the people an amount of documentary information on the organization, the defects, and means of improvement, of common schools, more copious than was ever distributed before, in any part of the world. Continually supplied with their able reports by the county superintendents, the *Journal* has made the atmosphere of New York nutritious with common school ideas, and electric with common school zeal.

In the prime of life, and in the full vigor and maturity of his powers, and capability of discharging his duties, Mr. Dwight has left that noble sphere of action, which, from the affinities of his own mind to virtue and to usefulness, he had chosen. Public sorrow and private friendship mingle their regrets at his loss. At this season, when the harvest is so plenteous but the laborers are so few, ill can such a workman be spared.

The press throughout the state united in the expression of regret at so "irreparable a loss." The following notice from the pen of S. S. Randall, Esq., appeared in the *District School Journal*, Jan., 1846:—

In place of the customary gratulations of this festive season, our columns are this month clothed in the habiliments of mourning, in consequence of the lamented death of him who has heretofore, and for so long a period, been their guiding and informing spirit! On the 15th of December, ult., that spirit took its flight from earth to heaven, leaving desolation, solitude, and deep affliction to his bereaved family, and a large circle of acquaintances and friends. The numerous and touching testimonials of the various public bodies with which he was connected at the time of his death, and which we take the melancholy satisfaction in transferring to our columns, show the estimation and regard in which he was held by them and by the community in which he resided; but the loss which that community and the interests of popular education have sustained, can not be adequately expressed in words. Although liberally educated and furnished with all the advantages which wealth and foreign travel could supply, Mr. Dwight had devoted every energy of his fine talents and richly cultivated mind to the advancement of the interests of common school education. Industrious, indefatigable, judicious, and discriminating, he had availed himself of every practicable source of information and knowledge, which might in any way be brought to bear upon this great field of labor and usefulness; and "the cause he knew not, he searched out." He was a most efficient auxiliary in the establishment and organization of the existing common school system; and has uniformly been one of its most ardent and enthusiastic supporters and defenders, "through evil and through good report." In the discharge of the various public duties which were, from time to time, cast upon him, he was accurate, thorough, and efficient; and many an educator of youth will trace to the well-filled pages of this *Journal*, while under his immediate supervision, the germs of excellence and the materials of future progress in an arduous and laborious profession. As a man and a citizen, he was universally beloved and respected; and, if a life of earnest and constant endeavor to be useful in his generation, constitutes any test of christian charity, and religious hope, those consolations of the word of God, which cheered his dying hours and illumined the "dark valley of the shadow of death," afford the most gratifying assurance, that for him "to die was gain."

His funeral was attended on the 18th ult. from his late residence; and, notwithstanding the inclemency of the day, all classes of our citizens united in paying the last tribute of respect and affection to their deceased friend. The adja-

cent churches were thrown open for the accommodation of the pupils of the public schools, and such others as could not obtain entrance into the house; and the procession of citizens, on foot and in sleighs, was one of the largest and most imposing ever known in our city. In short, on no occasion have we ever known a more deep and general feeling of sympathy and grief than that which pervaded all classes of our community on the receipt of the melancholy intelligence of the death of our distinguished friend.

We have been permitted to peruse a note of condolence, written to his relict, (Dec. 18th, 1845,) by a distinguished friend of the deceased, the Hon. D. D. Barnard, of Albany, from which we make a few extracts:—

I hope it may not be deemed altogether an intrusion upon a grief so unspeakable as yours must be, that I seek to offer you in this way, in a single word or two, the expression of my heart-felt sympathy. I believe I know, better than any one out of his own family circle, what a loss you have met with in the death of your husband. I had, years ago, an opportunity to become most intimately acquainted with him; and, as he was utterly guileless, *I did* know him thoroughly, and just as truly as I knew him. I loved him, and mourn him as a brother. How vividly are now revived within me the unforgotten, and never *to be* forgotten, impressions then made on me, by his brilliant parts, his manly bearing, his high-souled generosity, his gentle heart, as tender and loving as a woman's. May I not hope it may tend a little to soothe the violence of your grief to know that he was well appreciated and sincerely loved? He had troops of grateful friends here, and all over the state, and his death is felt, and will be felt, as a severe public loss. This is something for you to know; but I wish you to know also that, for one, from the bottom of my heart I loved him. Happy as he was, happy in his family, and above all in you, respected by the world, and doing a world of good, how hard it must have been for him to die; and yet, as I am told, he was so calm, so composed, so resigned! This was like him; and, besides, he was a Christian. Let us bless God for this, and take comfort; and may God's own gracious arm, and his abundant love, sustain, revive, and console you.

We conclude by another quotation from a letter addressed to the widow of Mr. Dwight, by the Hon. Henry Barnard, of Hartford, Conn., then of Providence, R. I.:—

No death in the whole circle of my friends could have occurred so utterly unexpected, so startling in its announcement, as that of your husband. This very week, I anticipated spending a few days with him, that we might take sweet counsel together, on subjects to which we were mutually devoted. Although every where respected, and numbering troops of friends, it was in the walks of private life, in the numberless, nameless acts of kindness and of love, which marked his in-door family daily history, that the purest and most attractive traits of his character were exhibited, and that his loss will be longest and most deeply felt.

As a laborer in the same field, I feel his loss most heavily. No one could be more sincerely wedded to any cause, more willing to spend and be spent in its service, than he was to the cause of a generous and complete education of the whole people. Such laborers are few; and God grant that the standard, which he bore aloft so steadily, may fall into hands as strong—it can not be protected by a heart more true.

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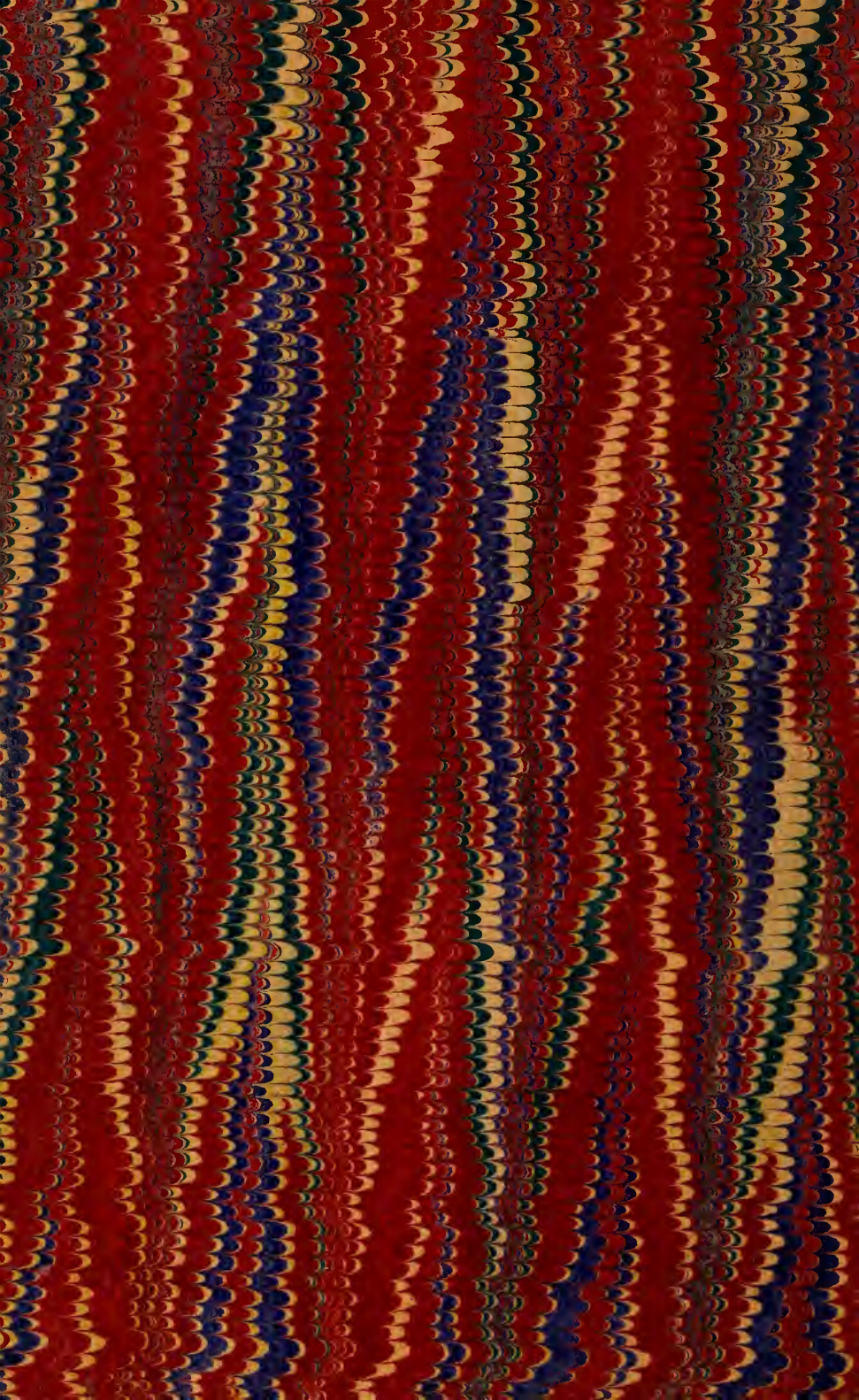
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